

Old Skool Games

Bringing the gaming past to the present



PLATOON

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Contra III
Metal Marines
Military Madness
PLATOON
P.O.W.
Rambo

Featured Review PLATOON



Contra



Rambo



Metal Marines

Issue #3
July 2005

Celebrating 229 Years Of Independance!

Nintendo - Sega - Atari - Turbo Grafx - Articles - Reviews - Interviews - Emulation

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OOPS!

Does something not look right?
Did we goof up a hero's name?
If you see an error, let us know.
[E-mail](#) us.

COVER STORY PLATOON



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At Old Skool Games, we appreciate the hard work of our staff. Every issue, we list the names of all the people who have worked hard to make every word you read enjoyable.

Want to help?

If you are interested in submitting a review just check out the info [here](#).

Contributing Authors For This Issue Are:

[Carlos Hernandez](#)

[Chris Morley](#)

[Eric Ladd](#)

[Eric Wu](#)

[Tres Bradshaw](#)

Old Skool Games Staff:

Zachary Bartels

-Owner

-Editor in Chief

-PDF Graphics

-PDF Management and Production

Oops!

Sometimes at Old Skool Games we make mistakes. We don't always catch them, but when they are brought to our attention we'll list them here.

Mistakes In Issue #2

On page 12, from the TMNT review - Leonardo was spelled wrong.

* Writing and editing assistance provided.

Legal Stuff:

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Letter From The Editor:

Every day, thousands of men and women stationed all over the world, dedicate themselves to us.

Welcome to the third issue of Old Skool Games! I am very proud that OSG is becoming more successful with each and every issue we deliver, and I am very grateful to all the talented writers who have donated their time and energy to the project thus far. July is a special month for OSG, as well as for the United States of America, the country in which we are based. Roughly two hundred and twenty-nine years have gone by since many brave people rose up to defend what they believed in, and our nation's first army was effectively born...

Since the days of The Revolution, countless men and women have served our country proudly, through good and bad times. These people are what this issue of OSG is all about, and as you flip through the following pages, we hope you will learn something about the courage and dedication that these brave people are capable of, as portrayed through the games we will review. There is a lot of political strife in the world today and we do not want to contribute to it, so I would like to say to everyone that you will not find such things contained within the pages of this magazine.

The theme for our third issue is going to be war games. For as long as gaming has been around, there have been spectacular successes and flops on the war games front. Whether you are into board games, reenactment, or into war-themed video games on one particular, or all game consoles and arcades, no one can deny that the obsession with such games is rooted deeply into our culture. Like movies, they bring us hero and villain alike, and in the case of video games, they allow us to take it one step further and become someone special...

OSG remains firmly committed to political neutrality, after all, we are here to talk about games, not politics. We're not here to make statements about governments or wars, and this issue is just a good old fashioned look at a few of the many war-themed video games that a lot of us grew up on. Nevertheless, this is a special issue, an issue intended to honor those who bravely serve our country, regardless of where they are stationed in the world and what their job is. It doesn't matter if you are a cook, a desk clerk, or the guy on the front lines; you are all important, and this issue is dedicated to you, you've earned it.

Our sincerest thanks,

-Zachary M Bartels
Editor In Chief, Old Skool Games.

Support Our Troops!

Every day, countless men and women are putting their lives on the line for us. We may not know them, or they may be our dearest friends and family. We may not agree with the reasons they are stationed somewhere in the world, or we may support the people who put them there; regardless of all that, soldiers are normal human beings who have needs like everyone, and they deserve our support!

Operation Home Link	http://www.operationhomelink.org/donate.shtml
Operation Home Phone	http://www.uso.org/pubs/8_20_2733.cfm
Operation USO Care Package	http://www.usocares.org/src/uso_donate.htm

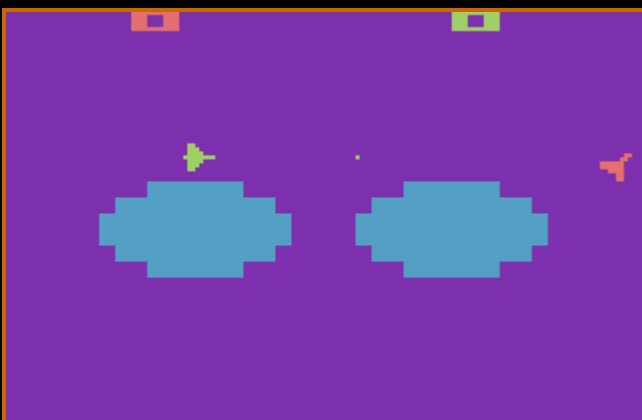
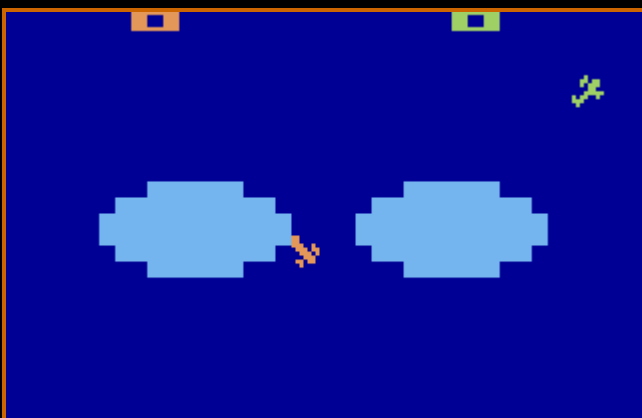
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General donations to the USO will support - Hospital Support for Recuperating Soldiers, USO Overseas Centers, Mobile Canteens, Airport Centers, Family and Community Centers, Celebrity Education Program, USO Entertainment Tours, USO picnics.

Combat

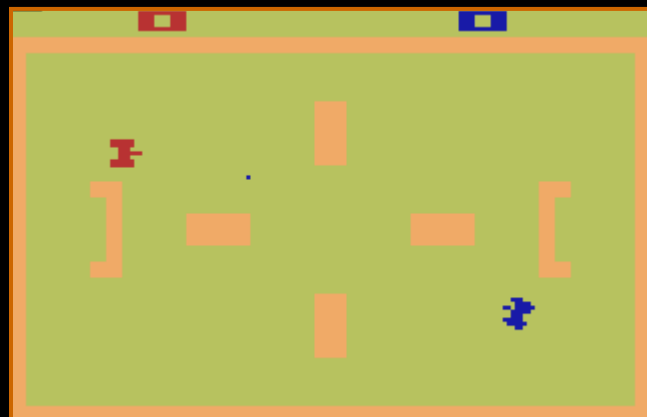
In the spirit of the war-themed edition, I feel it necessary to go back to, and take a look at one of the first war games of all time: Combat, for the Atari 2600. Atari released Combat in 1977, and for Atari players, it is likely the first game they ever played, as Atari included the game free with its 2600 consoles. Twenty-eight years later, Combat still remains one of the most recognizable Atari 2600 games.

Combat includes twenty-seven different game variations spread out over three combat simulations. Fourteen games use the tank simulation, whereas six use the bi-plane simulation and seven, the jet fighter simulation. All variations in Combat are two player games, where the player scores points for shooting his opponent. The number of hits is recorded at the top of the gaming screen, and the first to 24 points wins. The tank simulation offers the most game variations, through different player maps, invisible tank mode, guided firing; and my favorite, ricochet mode, where the players bullet actually ricochets off the walls and other obstacles on the screen in search of the enemy. Game variations in the bi-plane and jet fighter simulation include one on one dog-fighting, two on two, three on one, guided firing, and clear skies or cloudy skies mode, where the planes can fly out of sight behind the clouds.



Gameplay is quite simple, as the player uses a standard joystick to move their combat vehicle around the screen. As a young gamer, I enjoyed playing this game from time to time, but the biggest drawback was the two player only aspect of the game. It would be nice to be able to play against the AI, for times when there are no other players around. Graphically, there is not much to brag about here, as game variations use no more than four colors, and the combat vehicles are blocky looking, but then again you have to remember, we are talking about a vintage Atari 2600 game. With no use of music and simple combat vehicle noises, the sound is not impressive either, but remains effective for its purpose. In summation, Combat is an average game for the Atari 2600, but for its time was effective for introducing new gamers to the system. The single best contribution Combat made, and why I am most thankful for the game, is that it helped start the war gaming genre that we all enjoy on consoles today.

TRES BRADSHAW



Contra

When did I fall in love with Contra? Was it when my friend brought it over after school and we played all night? No, probably not. Was it when I rented it and beat it something like ten times in a row? Nah, that's not it either. Was it my freshman year of college when myself and three others spent twenty-eight hours a day playing it until we got so good we never died? Yep, we have a winner.

In case you missed the point of all that, I'm trying to say that Contra is an awesome game. My own personal addiction aside, the main reason I think it came out so well is the simple yet addicting formula Konami put together. Mix together interesting graphics and presentation, some pretty decent sound and music, with a bit of near perfect play control, and lots of fun comes out the other end.

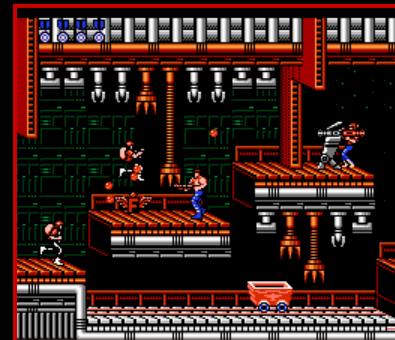
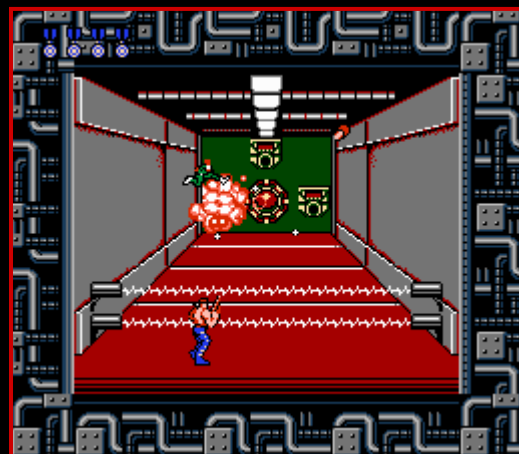
The story basically follows you and a friend as you fight against the invading army of Red Falcon, which apparently consists of a mixture of aliens and robots. You'll go through jungles, cliffs and enemy bases, all the while tearing through the enemy ranks and facing a boss at the end of each area. The game consists of six platform levels, all of which have a radically different appearance and atmosphere. There are also two enemy base levels which are done from an interesting semi-third-person perspective. All in all, on these special levels you can shoot at your normal height level while dodging side to side, you can duck down to fire and avoid bullets, and on bosses you can shoot straight up. It really does add some variety to it all, though I like the traditional platform levels better, but I give them credit for trying something different.

Sadly, in my opinion the sound effects are only decent. The guns and explosions are not very realistic at all, although I wonder how much more realistic the NES is capable of making them anyway. I suppose a mitigating factor to this is that everything else about the game is unrealistic on purpose, so weird sounding guns are acceptable, although still a bit disappointing. The music doesn't really sound like anything special either, as it's pretty much just generic upbeat NES stuff. In a way, it does sort of go well with the game, though. It's not offensive or grating, and it does tend to compliment the fast paced style of the game. This isn't the kind of game one plays for the sound anyway, and with all the action going on, you probably won't pay it much attention in the long run.



Fast paced games need tight, responsive controls, and Contra won't let you down in that department. From the incredible maneuverability in midair to the 8-way directional shooting, this game makes sure that fumbling with the controller will not be a problem. To be honest, solid controls make this game playable. With so much happening on the screen sometimes, lack of good movement would mean sure death. Contra handles this beautifully, though, and it really feels like you can do anything with your character at any time.

Speaking of the controls, this is as good a time as any to mention the arcade version of Contra. Compared to the NES version, the controls on the arcade version of this game are nowhere near as good. To be honest, I think the game as a whole is a lot better on the NES than in the arcade. The arcade looks better and



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all, but without the tight controls and fast paced style, it just can't compete in my book. Come to think of it, NES ports frequently seemed a lot better than their arcade counterparts. In any event, I recommend avoiding the Contra arcade version, and sticking to the Nintendo home console version.

Some might gripe about the game being too easy. I have to agree because the game is not very challenging to me at all. Maybe it's the fact that I have played it so much, or maybe it's the fact that the shotgun/spread gun totally melts everything on the screen, but I can tear through this game (and its sequel Super C) with no problems whatsoever. But if you ask me, even though some might say this is a bad thing, I think it helps the game out! Part of what makes this game fun to me and many others I know or have spoken with, is the fact that you can pick it up for a quick game, and whoop some ass. It's difficult enough to keep you moving and not be a mindless button masher, but it's easy enough to provide the satisfaction of unleashing mass destruction. It's the perfect blend if you ask me, and for some reason I never get tired of it, even though I totally own it every time I play. I give Contra a strong recommendation as a solo experience, and if you have a friend to play with then I don't think you can go wrong.

ERIC LADD



PLATOON

(Sucks, and I hate you)

Platoon sucks, and by suck, I mean Dyson. A vortex of fun-sucking extravagance the likes of which I have only read about (ET for the Atari, anyone?). To say it's terrible would be an insult to truly terrible games, like Daikatana.

I believe there are a limited amount of games that we get to play in our life. We should be judicious with how we spend our time and money, making sure that they are not ill-spent on bad titles. I was fortunate that as a child I was never subjected to this game, for I surely would have reconsidered what I was doing wasting time on the mind-numbing stupidity it presents. At the very least, as an adult, I consider this game in the top ten reasons never to become a game reviewer. I searched Google to see if anyone else has shared my pain in reviewing this bomb, but alas, others are wiser than I.

ENTERING THE COMBAT ZONE

PRESS FIRE TO CONTINUE



The only element of this game that even resembles the movie is the title screen, ripped right from the cover. After that, it's all down hill. "Entering The Combat Zone" should be more like entering The Twilight Zone. It's a maze of hell and you're sure you were just there; no matter where you are on the map. Our hero vaguely resembles a US Marine circa late 1960's, so I guess that's good. What's not good is that while walking along the various paths he looks like Michael Jackson doing the moonwalk - backwards... While traveling 'up' or 'down' he looks like Miss America on the runway. He sure knows how to swing those hips!

Sprite animations aside, the sheer idiocy of the Viet Cong, and the frustrating rate at which you die makes you really question your abilities as a gamer. I

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can pilot a helicopter in Battlefield 2 through the most bone-shattering encounters and come out golden, basking in my GOD-like abilities, but this game makes me feel like it's the first time I've ever picked up a controller.

The feeling is only worsened by the fact that the VC's bullets travel at half the speed and frequency of your own. They surely don't spray and pray. However, their forgetfulness of their weapons is offset by the fact that if they touch you they kill you, and they have the skills of an orangutan, able to come jumping out of a tree right on top of you, giving you virtually no opportunity to shoot them. Those that leap from nowhere apparently take after moles, with the ability to surface out of dirt with the greatest of ease.

Even the sound adds nothing to the gameplay. The "beeps" and "boops" remind me of my 486 before Creative Labs came to my rescue. It was actually more fun to play with the sound off... I really wish I could finish this game. I would so have liked to show you screen shots of other levels (if there are any) and how the game ends. But I can't. You couldn't pay me to finish this game, and I would consider it a total waste for anyone other than a collector to acquire it. Don't waste your time, or money.

CHRIS MORLEY



P.O.W.

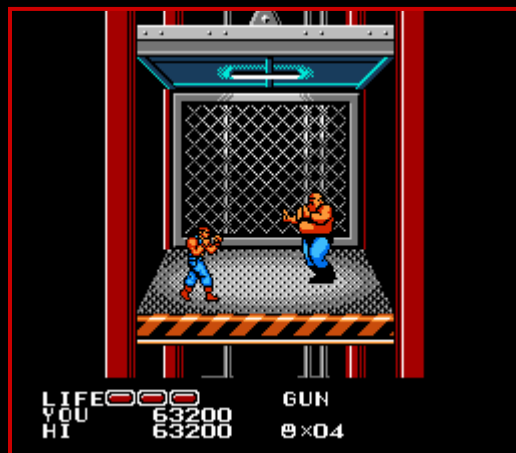
- PRISONERS OF WAR -



P.O.W. for NES is pretty awful. I figured I would get that out of the way right at the beginning to save some people the time of reading the whole review. If you care to know why I hate this game, read on. Hopefully I won't bore you as much as P.O.W. would.

You play the role of Bart, who is sent on a secret mission that involves being captured, and then taking on the enemy army from the inside out. Basically you spend the first level escaping from the P.O.W. camp, then the rest of the game involves fighting through various enemy territories to get to their leaders. When I found out that your character isn't even a real P.O.W. I was a bit let down, and unfortunately that was just the beginning of the problems.

As I already mentioned before, this game is terribly boring. Your character has very limited attacks, consisting of punches, kicks, jump-kicks, and the ability to hit people behind you. The game offers you some weapons, namely a knife and a gun, as well as some power-ups, allowing you to increase attack, health or armor. These items give the game a bit of variety, mainly the armor which enemy bullets bounce off of, but they ultimately don't help much because of a little problem involving ratios. You get to throw the knife once, and you get very few bullets for a gun. Add this to the fact that there are like eight-billion enemies to beat in a level, and the weapons almost seem pointless. They do make things a *bit* more fun, but the monotony defeats that in the long run.



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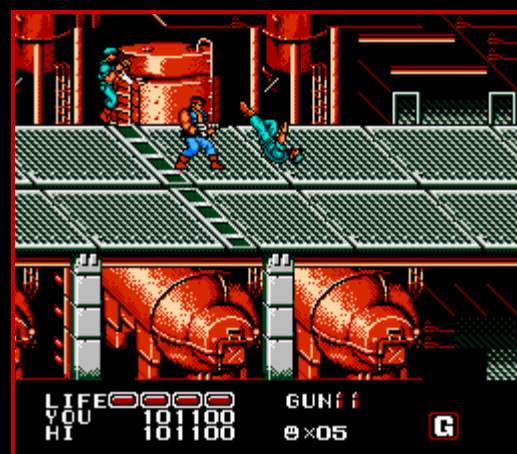
Speaking of eight-billion enemies and monotony, there are basically three different soldiers that you will see over and over and over for ninety-percent of the game. I guess I should take a minute to mention how they don't really fall down when hurt, but just sort of fly backwards and balance on their shoulders with their legs sticking up in the air until they are upright again. So much for realism... Anyway, most of them are unarmed, and some carry knives or guns. Every once in a while there will be someone throwing grenades or trying to run over you with a motorcycle, but these are few and far between. Still, seeing anything except for the hordes of generics makes things a little more interesting, and will hopefully keep you sane long enough to reach the bosses. Oh, wait a minute, most of those suck too.

Now is the time to tell you about the only two parts of this game I enjoyed, which are two of the bosses. One of them is the boss of level 1, and the other is the boss of level 4 or 5; I can't remember which... I was so bored and uninterested by that point that I lost count. Anyway, these bosses involve stealing grenades from some of the soldiers and chucking them at the helicopter or tank that is hanging around trying to shoot you while unloading more soldiers. I had a lot of fun with both of these boss battles; probably because they were about the only thing on the game that required more than button mashing. Sadly the other bosses were either boring and generic like the rest of the enemies, or really lame and out of place. Can anyone tell me why the army has a sumo wrestler under it's employment?

The one thing about P.O.W. that I can't really say anything bad about is the sound. The effects are fine and on par with the standard NES fare. The music didn't blow me away or anything, but it was pleasant enough to show me a decent tune and instrumentation, and tame enough to not grate on my nerves. It just fades into the background like good music should.

At the end of the day, I think the main thing this game suffers from at this point is over saturation. There have been eleventy-billion side scrolling beat'em-ups, and the market for those got old really fast. Having lived through the late eighties and early nineties when so many of those games were being manufactured, these days it really takes something special to make that formula stand out, let alone contain any replay value. As it stands, though, P.O.W. is just a victim of age. With too much repetition in gameplay, and not enough interesting levels or encounters, I think that this one is better left un-played.

ERIC LADD



Congraturation!

Rambo

After the 1985 theatrical release of "Rambo: First Blood Part II", the character of John Rambo was very popular among the war movie genre buffs, and especially among kids in my age bracket at the time (10-18 years old). Everyone had to have a Rambo action figure, Rambo headband, or if you were really lucky, an actual reproduction of Rambo's famous survival knife, which could do everything from starting fires, to cutting barbed wire fences. Needless to say, with the popularity of Rambo, the video game industry decided to cash in on its popularity as well with the release of a few Rambo themed games. Sega released two games for its Master System; Rambo, in 1986, which resembled a kicked-up version of Capcom's own "Commando", and in 1988 they released Rambo 3, which featured use of the Sega light gun. In addition to these two games, Sega also released "Rambo III" for its Sega Genesis console as well. The game to be reviewed today is the NES entry to the Rambo video game collection: Acclaim's 1988 release, simply titled, Rambo.

Rambo is a side scrolling action game, that follows the storyline of "Rambo: First Blood Part II". In addition to the typical side scrolling fighting arena, the game also features character interactions that essentially play through the story outlined in the movie. Rambo has to go to Vietnam to rescue some POW's left behind from the Vietnam War. The interaction screens outline the story by having Rambo talk to the main characters from the movie; Col. Trautman, Murdock, Co, the gunboat captain, POW's and many others. As the story is outlined and allowed to play out, Rambo eventually meets up with Co, a woman that assists Rambo in finding the POW's, he then finds the POW's (well, actually you only see a single POW), gets dissed by the Army and is left behind in the jungle. Eventually fighting his way out of the jungle

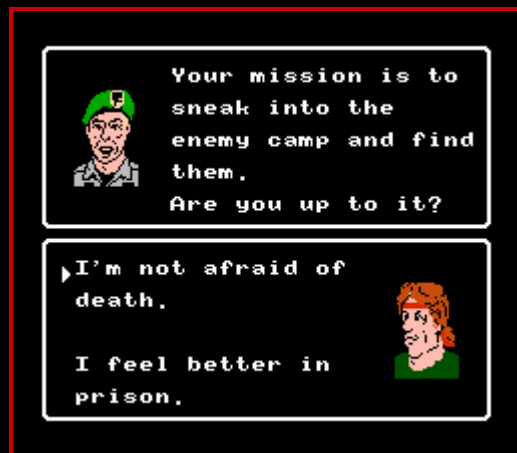


while defeating the enemy. Also worth noting is that for a short period of time, after Rambo has been captured, you play as Co, who seduces one of the guards in order to free Rambo.

The gameplay in Rambo is challenging, because your character's movements are limited, which makes fighting difficult. For example, although you can eventually use pistols, machine guns, grenades and rocket launchers, which make the fighting a bit easier, Rambo's main weapon, especially early in the game, is his survival knife. When he uses it, he does so in a top to bottom tomahawk style chopping motion, which means your timing has to be to pin-point, and often times, hitting a flying creature can be more than difficult. With enemies ranging from bats, to tigers, and militiamen, limited character movements add a high degree of difficulty to the game.

As noted earlier, Rambo is side-scrolling, although it's not level based. The game is essentially a big maze that can at times, be very confusing to keep up with. As you move Rambo across the screen there are little blocks under the ground with N, S, E or W on them (north, south, east or west). To go to another screen, you move on top of that box, and push up on your control pad. Considering this is a 2-D side scrolling game, keeping a four direction map in your head can be very difficult and confusing! What you usually find yourself doing is going essentially in circles, trying to navigate yourself through the game. After several circles and the process of elimination, you can usually bring yourself to the screen you need. The graphics are middle of the road for the NES in 1988. Acclaim's graphics

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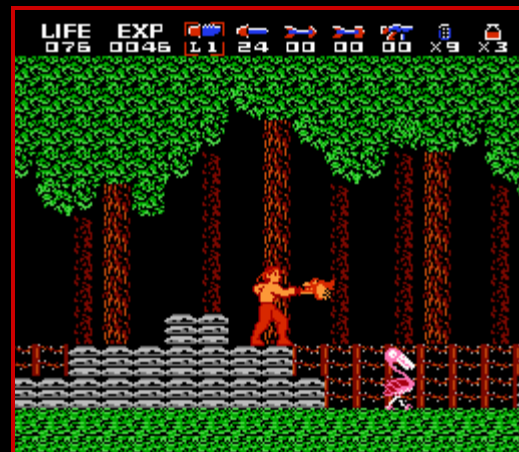


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were never the best on the system, but they were good enough to be effective. The music, again is decent for the NES in that time period, using a lot of high pitched notes, which reminded me of the music in "Mike Tyson's Punchout".

Rambo is one of those games that you are either going to love or hate. If you are not a fan of the movie series, you probably will not enjoy this title as much as someone that is a fan of the movie, simply because there is not enough substance there to keep the casual gamer interested. When I originally played it 17 years ago (wow... hard to believe it was that long ago), I liked it, and still do today, although I like it more for nostalgic reasons. There are several war genre games out there that are better than this title, but if you like the Rambo series, and never played this game way back when it came out, keep an open mind and give it a try. You just might like it!

TRES BRADSHAW



Contra III

The Alien Wars

It's the year 2636 and something evil lurking in outer space is about to change the world. An entire army of aliens is interested in our planet, and today they have decided to take it over, throwing everything at the Earth in an attempt to exterminate everyone. Now, the world needs a hero, or maybe even two, to save the human race from extinction. It's time for revenge!

Released in 1992 by Konami, this is the third installment of the Contra saga for a Nintendo console, and arguably one of the best. Continuing on with the platform-shooter concept, the game got a nice upgrade compared to its NES relatives, most notable are the explosion and environmental effects, as well as some pretty good music. You can choose to play by yourself or with a friend, and there is also a difficulty setting option. In easy mode the game is really a piece of cake, so if this is your first time playing it, then you may feel better playing on this setting - just remember you won't be able to finish the game in this mode. To finish the game you will need to select normal, or hard mode. Normal mode doesn't differ much from easy mode, but there will be slightly harder and also includes more enemies.

Compared to easy and normal, hard mode is really a nightmare... The enemies are tougher, have better defense, and overall speed. You should really build up your skill as a player before attempting this mode. You'll likely see shots from everywhere as they throw everything they have at you, and the bosses are harder to kill too. The final boss has three forms in this mode, so be prepared to face him, assuming you make it that far. Try to keep in mind that these guys are aliens and you're just a little human, so it might be less stressful, and you might suffer one less broken controller, if you play this mode with a friend.

For a game that was made years ago, Contra III has some pretty nice graphics. I think they are pretty great myself. I think the game was made perfectly, and I can't find any mistakes at all in the game design, most of the backgrounds look awesome, and the special effects create a nice atmosphere while playing. Try taking a break to admire the cool environment around you when you get the chance. Everything from player sprites, to all the in-game enemies, to the bosses will surely impress most people with their level of detail. The music is equally awesome, and I really think they did a great job developing the tunes, and even the sound effects. Even when you are deeply involved in the game, the music still manages to shine through and lend itself to the overall feeling of the levels.

The controls are just as impressive as the rest of the game, and you have plenty of freedom with your character. Control is obviously one of the most important parts of a platform-shooter so it's good to see the issue wasn't ignored. You can shoot in pretty much any direction you wish, duck, jump, attack with your primary gun or grenades, so killing things shouldn't be much of a problem. A classic game with great replay value makes for a good recommendation.

CARLOS HERNANDEZ



Metal Marines

Ah, Metal Marines. What a cool sounding name. And what comes to mind? I pictured some sort of Metal Slug type 2D shooting game where you have a big machine gun and jump around blowing up monsters or terrorists. Boy, that would be fun, wouldn't it? Unfortunately I was in for a great disappointment. Metal Marines tries to be a turn based strategy game, but in my opinion, fails miserably. The failure however isn't totally the fault of the game itself; controlling this type of game with a game pad is pretty rough, and I'd much rather use a mouse. Considering the limited controls the SNES offers, Metal Marines is way too complicated. There is a sidebar that contains all the objects you can build, but building things isn't that important if you are going to establish early on, that the player is going to end up staring blankly at the screen in confusion...

You can construct buildings, decoys of bases, armies of Metal Marines and so on. The list is pretty long and scrolling though it is very annoying, but other than that, it's pretty self explanatory. The attack menu was also very confusing. I never once successfully attacked an enemy, seeing as how I didn't know where they were, nor did I know how to select my own units! The menu for attacking just showed the layout of the map in a grid. Some of the tiles of the grid were colored, so at first I assumed that those were enemy units, but later it became pretty obvious that my own structures occupied those colored tiles, yet those tiles did not represent my base, so what did they represent? I couldn't tell you if my life depended on it. Perhaps they were just random buildings. During "combat" (I still don't know what triggers that), missiles came from off the screen and blew up my buildings.

I never quite understood this game and even after an hour of mindless clicking, I still didn't get it. An in game tutorial or some sort of help would've been great but it was nowhere to be seen. Maybe I'm just stupid, or maybe I'm just impatient, but this game in my opinion was pretty bad. Go try the game out, there's a chance you'll find some charm in the game that I never found, I doubt it though...

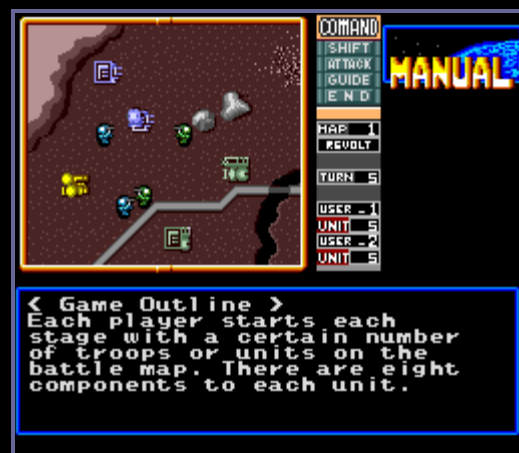
ERIC WU



Military Madness

Military Madness is a pretty interesting title to play. I didn't load the game up expecting much from it, to be honest, but I soon found that I liked it a lot. I really didn't have much experience with the TG-16 as a kid, and even now I don't get a chance to play many games on the system, but the ones I do sit down and play, really do help to build a great opinion of the console as a whole.

Released back in 1989, the game boasts surprisingly nice graphics (like most decent TG games), and although limited, a pretty nice soundtrack as well. There really isn't much depth to the game, as far as options and units go. You have your infantry, tanks, anti-tank weapons, and all the usual stuff you would expect from a war game. I have to say that looking back, it was definitely one of the better strategy games that has been released, mainly for its smooth graphics and animation. The game offers you a small back-story, and what really impressed me, was the included information system. It will teach you about certain units, teach you how to play the game, all that nice stuff. The game itself boasts a wide variety of maps, and also has decent replay value.



The strategy is a little confined to what units you start with vs. what the enemy has, but aside from that you can still make or break the battle based on a few key reactions. Throughout the game you will learn to hone your skills in securing and establishing choke points, taking enemy buildings, and most importantly; learning to keep your units alive, since they do gain personal experience and power as a result of repeatedly winning battles. Also worth noting is the terrain system, so make sure you learn how to handle objects on the battlefield, elevation differences, and use them to your advantage. Simple for the time, but fun to play, Military Madness is highly recommended to strategy fans.

ZACHARY BARTELS